

**TURBAN IS RELIGIOUS SYMBOL; IT
MUST NOT BE REMOVED**

HON. EDOLPHUS TOWNS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 15, 2001

Mr. TOWNS. Mr. Speaker, I was distressed to find out that another Sikh was forced to remove his turban at LaGuardia Airport in New York. I am from New York, as you know, and it particularly distresses me to learn that this occurred in my home city.

According to the website Rediff.com, Surjit Babra, president of a \$100 million company called SkyLink, "was forced to remove his turban" at LaGuardia airport in New York, allegedly as part of a security inspection. Mr. Babra is a Canadian Sikh who was trying to board a flight back to Toronto. Previously, a sitting judge who is Sikh was forced to remove his turban at the same airport. We must clean up the security procedures at this airport.

Security guards asked Mr. Babra to remove his turban. Mr. Babra suggested that the guard use a hand-held scanner to scan his turban. The security guard wouldn't accept that and made him remove his turban immediately.

Mr. Speaker, the turban is a religious symbol. It is required by the Sikh religion. It is one of the five symbols every Sikh is required to carry on his person. Removing a Sikh's turban is an insult to him and to the Sikh faith.

Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh, President of the Council of Khalistan, who visits my office often, sports a bright saffron turban. It looks

very impressive. He is a committed, practicing Sikh and he will not remove his turban in public under any circumstances. I am sure other Sikhs feel the same way. They should not be harassed by asking them to remove their turbans at routine security checks at the airport.

I agree with Gurbax Singh Malhi, a Sikh member of the Canadian Parliament, who said that "while understanding and sharing the terrible circumstances that have led to this point", the United States should "train and educate security personnel so that they will respect the right of people of the Sikh religion to wear turbans and not subject them to this undignified and unnecessary procedure".

I urge Transportation Secretary Mineta to order the FAA to stop the harassment of Sikhs and order that their turbans not be removed unless other security means show an absolute necessity to do so.

America is a land of freedom. Sikhs come here to escape from the repression they suffer in India. They have contributed to every aspect of American life. We even had one Sikh, Dalip Singh Saund, who served in this House in the early 60s. America must respect the religious freedom of Sikhs just as it respects the religious freedom of other faiths.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place the Rediff.com article on the Babra case in the RECORD for the information of my colleagues.

[From Rediff.com, Nov. 10, 2001]

CANADIAN SIKH FORCED TO REMOVE TURBAN
AT LA GUARDIA
(By Ajit Jain)

Surjit Babra, president of the \$100 million portfolio SkyLink, "was forced to remove

his turban" at LaGuardia airport in New York, allegedly as part of a security inspection.

In a press release, Indo-Canadian Member of Parliament Gurbax Malhi, himself a turbaned Sikh, said that "while understanding and sharing the terrible circumstances that have led to this point", the United States should "train and educate security personnel so that they will respect the right of people of the Sikh religion to wear turbans and not subject them to this undignified and unnecessary procedure".

Rediff.com tried to reach Babra several times, but he wouldn't respond to telephone calls.

Businessman Garry Singh, a close friend of Babra, recounted that it was on Wednesday evening, when he was going through security before boarding his flight to Toronto at LaGuardia, that the incident took place.

Babra was asked to remove his turban by the security guard. The Sikh businessman suggested that the guard use a hand-held scanner to scan his turban. If he were still not satisfied, he would then remove his turban.

The security guard wouldn't accept that and made him remove his turban immediately.

Malhi said, "In Canada we have learned to respect religious symbols." The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has changed its rules to allow Sikhs to wear turbans on duty.

Barbra's SkyLink moves U.N. peace-keeping personnel and equipment to various countries in the world.